

Re-Education and the Construction of Whiteness in the US Military¹

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ABSTRACTS

Dieser Artikel untersucht Prozesse der Re-education im Hinblick auf ihre Rassenregime, die in Diskursen über „Rasse“ und Rassismus im US-Militär gegen Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs und während der frühen Tage der US-amerikanischen Präsenz im Nachkriegsdeutschland zum Ausdruck kommen. Er arbeitet die Rolle des Weißseins und des weißen Privilegs, das gegenüber einem schwarzen Anderen konstruiert wird, im Zentrum der US-Militärmission in Europa (und darüber hinaus) heraus und zeigt, wie die Kriegsanstrengungen und die (Planung der) Besetzung und Re-education/Neuorientierung Deutschlands Reflexionen über rassische Ungleichheit innerhalb der US-Armee (und der US-Gesellschaft insgesamt) auslösten. Dieses Potenzial interner Reformen und selbstbewusster ‚Umerziehung‘ unter dem Deckmantel des Arbeitskräftemanagements und der Steigerung der Effizienz im Ausland, wie begrenzt auch immer sein tatsächlicher Einfluss auf die Abschwächung von Rassismus und die Infragestellung weißer Hegemonie sein mag, verweist auf die (unbeabsichtigten) Auswirkungen der Re-education im eigenen Land noch vor den offiziellen Programmen, die sich an deutsche Zielgruppen richteten.

This article examines processes of re-education with regard to their racial regimes epitomized in discourses on race and racism in the US military toward the end of World War II and during the early days of the US-American presence in post-war Germany. It teases out the role of whiteness and white privilege, which is constructed via-à-vis a black Other, at the centre of the US military mission in Europe (and beyond) and shows how the war effort and the (planning of) the occupation and re-education/reorientation of Germany prompted a reflection on racial inequality within the US Army (and US society at large). This potential of internal reform and

1 This article presents part of my research conducted in the context of the interdisciplinary project “Re-education Revisited: Transnationale und kulturvergleichende Perspektiven auf die Nachkriegszeit in den USA, Japan und Deutschland”, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – Project Number: 407542657.

self-conscious re-education under the guise of managing manpower and bolstering efficiency abroad, however limited in its actual influence on mitigating racism and challenging white hegemony, bespeaks the (unintended) effects of re-education at home, even prior to the official programmes targeting the German population.

1. Introduction

Race has, by now, been firmly established as a central category for historical, cultural, and sociological studies of the post-war years and the US re-education efforts in defeated Germany (and elsewhere). African American soldiers, in this context, have emerged as a crucial focus to examine the racial politics in the transatlantic sphere. Studies have documented and analysed their experiences in American-occupied Germany and their interactions with the German population,² traced their influences on the Civil Rights movement in the US,³ and assessed their impact on German notions of race and identity.⁴ Their presence may have “forced some Germans to confront many of the racial demons which had been nurtured by over a century *völkische* ideology, German imperialism and Nazi propaganda,”⁵ and the term *Rasse* as a categorical difference that had been at the centre of National Socialist ideology became taboo in the post-war context.⁶ Yet, Germans quickly “recast” their understanding of race⁷ and soon reclaimed “whiteness [...] as an unmarked signifier of race and citizenship”.⁸

In the context of re-education,⁹ US-American occupiers/liberators and Germans could rely on a “shared sense of whiteness”¹⁰ and (tacit) knowledge about race and racism. As I will show by examining the discourses on racialization on and around the US military at the time, re-education also from the very beginning potentially addressed and af-

2 See M. M. Morehouse, *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army: Black Men and Women Remember World War II*, Lanham 2000; C. P. Moore, *Fighting for America: Black Soldiers – the Unsung Heroes of World War II*, New York 2005; J. Kleinschmidt, *Besatzter und Deutsche: Schwarze GIs nach 1945*, in: *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 40 (1995) 4, pp. 647–665; O. R. Schmidt, *Afroamerikanische GIs in Deutschland 1944–1973: Rassekrieg, Integration und globale Protestbewegung*, phil. Diss., WWU Münster, 2010, <https://d-nb.info/1034311794/34>.

3 See M. Höhn/M. Klimke, *A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany*, New York 2010; C. Knauer, *Let Us Fight as Free Men: Black Soldiers and Civil Rights*, Philadelphia 2014; K. Kruse/S. Tuck (eds.), *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement*, Oxford 2012; N. A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II*, Lanham 2010.

4 See H. Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America*, Princeton 2005; T. Schroer, *Recasting Race after World War II: Germans and African Americans in American-Occupied Germany*, Boulder 2007.

5 M. H. Little Jr., *The Black Military Experience in Germany: From the First World War to the Present*, in: D. McBride/L. Hopkins/C. A. Blackshire-Belay (eds.), *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa, and Germany in the Modern World*, Columbia 1998, pp. 177–196, at 193.

6 Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler*, p. 7.

7 Schroer, *Recasting Race*, p. 1.

8 U. Linke, *German Bodies: Race and Representation after Hitler*, New York 1999, p. 28.

9 Re-education is understood here as a complex and inadvertently mutual process that exceeded official policies.

10 D. Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946–1965*, New York 2007, p. 10.

fects US-Americans themselves. The war and the subsequent occupation compelled the military to engage with questions of race on an institutional level and as part of its self-fashioning and propaganda. In the process, albeit inadvertently, whiteness as an unmarked norm and source of privilege among the armed forces and in US society at large was not only affirmed but also became exposed and partially acknowledged. The assumption of whiteness as an unmarked norm and the structural racism it facilitated were implicitly extended to include the (white) German population. As Johannes Kleinschmidt has shown, US officials did not consider it necessary to prime and prepare Germans for the advent of African American soldiers; in fact, they were more concerned that black soldiers might treat the (former) enemy too kindly.¹¹ Indeed, the image of the friendly black GI engaging freely and generously with German children became a staple of the post-war imagination – despite the fact that many Germans also expressed racist views and utter dismay at the presence of black soldiers.¹² The US military, according to Timothy Schroer, attempted to “limit the presence, visibility, and role of African American soldiers in Germany in order to avoid arousing Germans’ racial antipathy” and because of their own racist belief that African Americans were not as capable as white soldiers.¹³ African American soldiers were stationed – more or less – all over the American occupation zone in the beginning and were only later concentrated in a small number of locations.¹⁴ The liberating experience of these soldiers in former Nazi Germany of all places and the perceived lack of racism among the German population became a powerful argument and motivational tool in the emerging Civil Rights movement as well as in the master narrative of German rehabilitation, which – among other things – coded race as an American problem and fuelled the illusion of a post-race moment in post-war Germany.

In transatlantic racial discourses, romantic and sexual relationships between African American soldiers and white German women – from initial flirtatious interactions to marriage vows to children resulting from these relationships – took on specific symbolic significance¹⁵ and posed a challenge to Jim Crow laws, to the US Army’s racial policies as well as to an emerging German (national) identity tied to whiteness. The cross-racial relationships were openly frowned upon on both sides of the Atlantic and thus attest to a shared anti-black racism and sense of white superiority in the transatlantic sphere. Cross-

11 Kleinschmidt, *Besatzter und Deutsche*, p. 648.

12 *Ibid.*, 652–654.

13 Schroer, *Recasting Race*, pp. 43–44.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 62. As Michael Cullen Green has pointed out, “[g]overnment policy, based in part on racial fears, [also] increased African American assignments to Japan relative to Europe” (M. C. Green, *Black Yanks in the Pacific: Race in the Making of the American Military Empire after World War II*, Ithaca 2010, p. 6).

15 See, e.g., K. Gerund, *Transatlantic Romance(s) of the Postwar Years: Interracial Relationships in Die PX-Story (1959) and Transgression (2015)*, in: B. M. Bauridl/I. Gessner/U. J. Hebel (eds.), *German-American Encounters in Bavaria and Beyond, 1945–2015*, Berlin 2018, pp. 147–170; M. Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany*, Chapel Hill 2002; N. Klopprogge, *The Sexualized Landscape of Post-War Germany and the Politics of Cross-Racial Intimacy in the US Zone*, in: C. Erlichman/C. Knowles (eds.), *Transforming Occupation in the Western Zones of Germany: Politics, Everyday Life and Social Interactions, 1945–55*, London 2018, pp. 171–190.

racial intimacy in Europe, as Alex Lubin points out, “challenged white military officials’ and soldiers’ abilities to control white female and black male sexuality abroad” and it “became central to civil rights organizing”.¹⁶ Not only does it reveal the precariousness and temporary nature of the freedom that African American GIs enjoyed in Germany, but it also shows the transnational and historical continuities of anti-black racism. The War Department tolerated “black GI interracial intimacy” abroad but posed high obstacles to interracial marriage and war bride migration to the US.¹⁷ Lubin’s research reveals that there were many cases in which cross-racial relationships were hampered by military policy:

*Sergeant William T. Malone was denied the right to marry his German fiancée because, according to his commanding officer, his interracial marriage signified his lack of maturity. [...] [T]he [...] officer undoubtedly thought that Malone had not considered the implication of antimiscegenation laws on his marriage. Yet such a statement also reveals how military policy relied on domestic race relations as a means to contain the explosive potential of international relations.*¹⁸

The continuities of white superiority and anti-black racism are evident, yet the forms of racism as well as the articulations of whiteness may have changed in the process of re-education. One soldier, Floyd Jones, remarked that, early on, the racism he encountered abroad was actually “made in the United States”.¹⁹ Re-education did not imply the un-learning and overcoming of Antisemitism and racism in all of its forms but rather a structural recalibration of racialized power structures and a reaffirmation of whiteness at the core of US-American and German national identities (constituted vis-à-vis a black American Other). The crucial paradox that the US fought fascism and racism abroad while at the same time facilitating racism among its own ranks and falling short of its own democratic ideal had been obvious from an African American perspective well before World War II and increasingly “embarrassed” white liberals in the US.²⁰ However, from a dominant perspective on US democracy, which has included such structural inequalities from its very inception, it appears rather consistent. The (re)construction of whiteness in German-American encounters after World War II from this hegemonic perspective facilitated the early Cold War logics that quickly turned the former enemies into friends and allies.²¹ As Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon have pointed out, the “more egalitarian relationship” between the US and Germany, compared to Japan and Okinawa, in the post-war years “was based on the assumption that this was an alliance between two

16 A. Lubin, *Romance and Rights: The Politics of Interracial Intimacy, 1945–1954*, Jackson 2005, p. 97.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

19 Quoted in M. P. Motley, *The Invisible Soldier: The Experience of the Black Soldier, World War II*, Detroit 1975, p. 178.

20 M. Höhn, “We Will Never Go Back to the Old Way Again”: Germany in the African-American Debate on Civil Rights, in: *Central European History* 41 (2008) 4, pp. 605–637, at 606.

21 See K. Gerund/H. Paul, *Einleitung*, in: K. Gerund/H. Paul (eds.), *Die amerikanische Reeducation-Politik nach 1945: Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf “America’s Germany”*, Bielefeld 2015, pp. 7–18, at 11.

white nations".²² The presence of soldiers of colour (as well as Afro-Germans) challenged this notion and turned the anti-black racism that had shaped US identity from its very beginnings into a transatlantic paradox of US democracy and democratization efforts. In the following, I will focus on how the construction of whiteness in the transatlantic context of World War II and US re-education goes hand-in-hand with the racial Othering of African American soldiers within the US military, and illustrate how it exposes white US officials, commentators, and actors as racial subjects in their own right and with an investment in the racialized and racist discourse of their time. I will look at several examples to illuminate the contours of the largely unmarked whiteness and anti-black racism at the heart of the US military mission to Germany which have been established even before the end of World War II: (1) the 'classic' propaganda film *The Negro Soldier* (1944),²³ (2) an official military documentation, the 1944 manual *Leadership and the Negro Soldier*,²⁴ which addressed white officers commanding black troops, as well as, by way of a conclusion, (3) accounts from members of the military "on the ground", i.e. African American soldiers' reflections of their service experience, and white war historian Melvin Lasky's diary, which covers his experiences during the final days of World War II in the European theatre and the immediate post-war moment. All of these sources show how white privilege and anti-black racism have informed the re-education efforts and laid the groundwork for the export of racism American style, while at the same time bespeaking an unintended project to re-educate or reform US-Americans themselves as part of the war effort.

2. *The Negro Soldier* and the (Re)Educational Potential of Wartime Propaganda

The Negro Soldier (1944) constitutes an important contribution to the (mainstream) representations of African Americans on screen,²⁵ a crucial piece of military propaganda during World War II, and an essential document on racial discourses in 1940s US. Pro-

22 M. Höhn/S. Moon, *The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Class in the U.S. Military Empire*, in: M. Höhn/M. Seungsook (eds.), *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War II to the Present*, Durham 2010, pp. 1–36, at 17 (emphasis added). Höhn and Moon further elaborate on the differences in the transatlantic and transpacific post-war context: "a multiracial occupation [...] confronted racial others in Asia but encountered for the most part, a homogenous white population in West Germany, which in turn was anxious about encountering soldiers of color" (ibid., p. 20).

23 *The Negro Soldier*, Dir. Stuart Heisler, 1944.

24 *Leadership and the Negro Soldier*. Army Service Forces Manual M5 Training, Washington, D.C. 1944.

25 According to Thomas Cripps and David Culbert, *The Negro Soldier* showcased the role of film for social change, facilitated the end of "race movies," and ushered in the era of the "message films" (T. Cripps/D. Culbert, *The Negro Soldier* (1944): Film Propaganda in Black and White, in: *American Quarterly* 31 [1979] 5, pp. 616–640, at 638–640). Elizabeth Reich similarly regards it as a film whose "general representational strategies were all but the inverse of the Hollywood set: [it] focused on domestic space, situating [its] soldiers in the embrace of the black community; [it] offered explicit and lengthy renditions of black history; and [it] directly addressed black concerns about the war" (E. Reich, *Militant Visions: Black Soldiers, Internationalism, and the Transformation of American Cinema*, New Brunswick 2016, p. 84).

duced by Frank Capra, written by Carlton Moss (who also stars as the minister), and directed by Stuart Heisler, the film was originally “intended solely for black troops”,²⁶ but, ultimately and due to the pressure of African American activists, reached a much broader audience, both military and civilian. Its content was carefully modified and censored by the Pentagon. The film capitalized on boxing champion Joe Louis’ star power and likens warfare to athletic competition. It was, however, neither allowed to showcase black officers and their achievements, nor to place significant emphasis on black soldiers at the front lines and in combat, and it had to stay clear of any substantial interracial interactions.²⁷ Delicately balancing the requirements of the Selective Training and Service Act, which prohibited racial discrimination in the military,²⁸ and its message of a unified war effort with the realities of a strictly segregated Army (and society), *The Negro Soldier* engages several strategies: 1) It conveniently erases any reference to enslavement and racial discrimination within the US, calling out the racism of the “enemies” instead. The term “enslaved”, for instance, is superimposed once in connection with the German enemy and followed by an image of several hanged men. These may resonate with images of lynching, but this racist and terrorist practice is here recoded to document the brutality of Nazi Germany. Similarly, the minister recites Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and especially its derogatory language used to describe blacks and its great contempt for African American achievements in a presumably less racist US society. Of course, as Kathleen German reminds us, “[d]uring World War II, both the Allies and the Axis powers expressed racial hatred and practiced systems of racial hierarchy”.²⁹ 2) It focuses on black middle-class life and black achievement within the US (and especially within the Army), thus avoiding stereotypical depictions of African Americans. At the same time, it appeals to white audiences by emulating their dominant middle-class norms and standards. 3) It uses patriotic tropes and rhetoric to evoke national unity during wartime, yet without ultimately questioning or unsettling segregationist views: the temporary nature of the alliance necessary to obtain victory is clearly marked.

With its narrative frame of a church service, which also serves as a form of containment and a source of symbolic authority, the film literally preaches to the black community and positions white viewers as outsiders, who are not directly addressed but rather overhearing the testimonials of black contributions to US warfare then and now. While the film shows black servicemen as well as a servicewoman among the congregation, the two main characters, who serve as narrators and reveal the significant role of the soldiers, are

26 Cripps/Culbert, *The Negro Soldier* (1944), p. 628.

27 See *ibid.*, p. 629.

28 The Selective Training and Service Act was signed into law on 16 September 1940 after barely passing Congress on 1 July. It was “the first peacetime conscription act in American history” and “recognized conscientious objection as matter of individual conscience” (C. Howlett, *Selective Service and Training Act*, in: J. G. Ryan/L. Schlup [eds.], *Historical Dictionary of the 1940s*, Armonk 2006, p. 349). It also included two provisions that addressed discrimination and stated that “race or color” should have no effect on an individual’s possibility to volunteer or to on the actual selection and training (see G. Q. Flynn, *Selective Service and American Blacks During World War II*, in: *The Journal of Negro History* 69 [1984] 1, pp. 14–25, at 14).

29 K. M. German, *Promises of Citizenship: Film Recruitment of African Americans in World War II*, Jackson 2017, p. 16.

the minister and a mother from the audience. The mother reads a letter from her son, Robert, who via voice-over gets to tell his own story to the theatrical audience. As Elizabeth Reich has convincingly argued, the opening sequence of the film “visually integrates the segregated armed forces” by superimposing the film’s title on the US military logo and “establishes the centrality of the church to black America and the centrality of the black soldier to the church”.³⁰ In contrast to the church audience, viewers of the film are offered visual evidence “that *black* Americans have made, transformed, and produced America” through a variety of quasi-documentary scenes covering US imperial endeavours from the settlement of the West to all major wars.³¹ Though carefully “avoid[ing] stories of black activism” the film tells a “quite radical [history] of black participation in the US armed forces” based on its substantial “revision of American history”³² that “reconstitute[s] black presence where it was absent from the official record and, in so doing, locate[s] black heroism and sacrifice at the figurative heart of the nation”.³³ As Reich points out, this inclusion of “African Americans in the story of the nation” comes at the prize of excluding other marginalized groups. It suggests to African Americans exclusively that “they will escape their place alongside the other oppressed communities in America and become, finally, fully American” through their participation in the war.³⁴ The black community is singled out for the promise of inclusion based on military service and patriotic duty. Along these lines, the film also explicitly delegitimizes any notion of solidarity and of possible alliances between African Americans and the Japanese. Kathleen German interprets the film as entailing a “narrative [that] transforms the once ‘inferior’ African American into a competent soldier”.³⁵

The Negro Soldier provides an intriguing example of propaganda turned against itself, as it became a potential tool for educating especially white Americans on the historical significance of black achievements for the nation as well as re-educating them with regard to racist beliefs and investment in structural racism.³⁶ While the film showcases black strife it also contains it in ways that work to avoid unsettling a white audience. Stephen Tuck states that “[u]ndoubtedly the Army had unwittingly commissioned a propaganda film that by 1944 had become powerful propaganda against military segregation”³⁷ and

30 Reich, *Militant Visions*, p. 102.

31 Ibid., p. 104.

32 Kathleen German explains that “[t]his revised history generated an unmistakably integrationist message for black viewers but reassured whites that victory was the ultimate goal of temporary cooperation” (German, *Promises of Citizenship*, p. 18).

33 Reich, *Militant Visions*, p. 84.

34 Ibid., p. 85.

35 German, *Promises of Citizenship*, p. 7.

36 While, of course, the actual effects of the film are impossible to assess, Kathleen German points out that it did reach a mass audience and finds it “more than likely” that “it modified perspectives and at the same time quieted demands for equality until military victory could be won” (p. 66). Whether World War II had a catalytic impact on progress with regard to racial equality or whether it even cemented racism and discrimination has been a contested issue in scholarship (see, e.g., Kruse/Tuck, *Fog of War*). My own readings seek to highlight the ambivalences of the racial discourses of the time rather than to neatly align the texts with a clear political-ideological agenda pointing towards consolidation or change of racial hierarchies and logics.

37 S. Tuck, *Fighting the Government with Its Own Propaganda: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the USA during*

contributed to the larger effects of wartime discourses, that Kathleen German describes as follows: “While neither blacks nor whites emerged cured of racial prejudice, American institutions were forced by the crisis of war to confront the inequities of racial separation.”³⁸ Its revisionist narrative and the marked necessity to temporarily collaborate cross-racially for the sake of triumphing over the Axis powers led to a new image of blackness in mainstream depictions without substantially challenging the status quo of segregation – it “provided a short-term compromise”.³⁹ *The Negro Soldier* strove to defer black “demands for change”, which were seen as the reason for “racial problems”, while unintentionally bolstering these demands by acknowledging the capabilities of black soldiers and African Americans’ significance in US history at large. Despite its re-educational potential and its inadvertent support of racial equality, the film cements segregation among its ranks (and in society at large) as it half-heartedly promises African Americans full citizenship earned through military heroism and projects racism onto the Axis powers while deflecting from the systemic anti-black racism entrenched in the social fabric of the US.

3. The US Army as “Social Relations Laboratory”?

The Army Service Forces manual entitled *Leadership and the Negro Soldier* for use in officer schools was published in 1944 and outlines the racial policies of the Army. It reveals its approach towards the “social relations laboratory”⁴⁰ that the institution inadvertently found itself to be operating in the context of World War II and its aftermaths – despite all proclamations to the contrary.⁴¹ The manual not only suggests *The Negro Soldier* as part of its accompanying teaching material but also indicates some of the same tensions that can be observed in the film. Already its foreword states that the “Army has no authority or intention to participate in social reform as such but does view the problem [i.e. blacks and more specifically the black soldier] as a matter of efficient troop utilization.” However, this also means that “[t]he fact that race prejudice does exist cannot, in the interest of efficient operation, be disregarded”.⁴² Throughout the manual as well as Ulysses Lee’s “classic” study *The Employment of Negro Soldiers*, which appeared later as a special study in the so-called *Green Books* series, the structural racism in US society is exposed, but the Army’s racism is relegated to the past or relativized as the military is posited as a “democratic” institution that after the Selective Training and Service Act was to include “[a]ll classes, all racial groups, all sections of the population of the United States and its

the Second World War, in: T. Haggith/J. Newman (eds.), *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933*, London 2005, pp. 116–123, at 122.

38 German, *Promises of Citizenship*, p. 5.

39 Ibid., p. 65.

40 Cripps and Culbert, *Negro Soldier*, p. 616.

41 See, e.g., U. Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops: United States Army in World War II*, 1963/2001, https://history.army.mil/html/books/011/11-4/CMH_Pub_11-4-1.pdf, p. 142 (accessed 15 October 2020).

42 *Leadership*, p. iv.

territories".⁴³ As Lee points out, "[t]he Army [...] insisted that its job was not to alter American social customs but to create a fighting machine with a maximum economy of time and efforts".⁴⁴ It is in this context of the management of mobilization, manpower, and combat readiness, that the manual has to be read and interpreted.

It constitutes an educational tool with restricted circulation and for very specific audiences, i.e. white officers in command of black soldiers. The (white) officers are confronted with their biases⁴⁵ and are, for example, made aware that black soldiers do not constitute a homogenous group but may share a "background" with "common problems".⁴⁶ Black soldiers and Japanese American soldiers continued to be the only groups organized in separate units in the US military at the time, which is justified in the text by pointing out that the "Army [...] reflects the pattern of that larger [social] body" even though the institution itself "*does not [...] endorse any theory of racial superiority or inferiority*".⁴⁷ In this sense, leaders are expected to insure that "Army *standards* of training, performance, and leadership of Negro and white troops are identical."⁴⁸ The document also harbours re-educational potential as it openly tackles racist attitudes, images, and practices with an eye to the systemic inequalities that shape US society at large. Throughout, it acknowledges the realities and detrimental effects of structural racism:

*In civilian life every Negro, at one time or another, has either been told, or has read, or has been made to feel that he is considered inferior by the majority of white people [...] [and] has had to face to a greater or less extent (depending upon his community of residences and his family's financial position) limited opportunities for education, employment, recreation, housing and participation in the life of his community.*⁴⁹

43 Ibid., p. 1. See also Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, pp. 74–77 and p. 84.

44 Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, p. 83.

45 Lee retrospectively outlines the significance of this task to revise habitualized racist practices and attitudes: "Men who in all their lives had never considered it necessary, in their relation with Negroes, to practice the ordinary courtesies in human relations which make the civilized life of complex societies tolerable to its individual members were not always able to reach suddenly the conclusion that 'these men are human' and only waiting, like other men, to be led." (ibid., p. 183).

46 Leadership, pp. 1 and 2.

47 This claim is forcefully repeated in a later chapter: "The Army accepts no theories of racial inferiority or superiority for American troops but considers that its task is to utilize its men on their individual merits in the achievement of final victory. A realistic and impartial examination of evidence on racial differences in ability supports this position" (Leadership, p. 26).

48 Ibid., p. 4.

49 Ibid., p. 12. These inequalities are fleshed out with almost every aspect covered in the manual. Regarding adjustment, for instance, the text proposes that all soldiers have to adjust to the Army and the problems of black soldiers only differ by degree. In that, however, they provide for a special challenge for the white officer to handle the more significant skepticism and "lack [of] enthusiasm for the Army venture" due to the limitation for blacks in civilian life and those situations "that inevitably will raise questions and doubts in the minds of many Negro soldiers as to the worth of the venture and the reality for them of the goal" (ibid., p. 11). The manual further points toward the inequalities in the educational system (ibid., see chap. 3), explains the higher death rates and lower life expectancy for African Americans with the "less healthful environmental conditions under which Negroes live", the lack of access to medical treatment (ibid., p. 46), and exposes the stereotypes, omissions, and misconceptions that shape media representations of African Americans in news outlets as well as popular culture (ibid., see chap. 6).

It emphasizes that there are no inherent or hereditary differences connected to race but “there are differences in custom, experience, education, and behaviour between racial groups, just as there are such differences between individuals within any group”.⁵⁰ Throughout this textbook, white superiority and structural racism of US society are addressed. The US Army – in the interest of military efficiency and out of dire necessity for the manpower to continue fighting in the war⁵¹ – has to deal with the consequences of these social realities and, according to the manual, has no place for racism among its ranks. White officers thus have to overcome “civilian beliefs and prejudices [...] based on unfounded but widely accepted myths” and treat their soldiers as individuals.⁵² The “good” white officer commanding black soldiers, the manual holds, does not “think that his men are inherently inferior to any other group of men”, he “should make it his duty to learn the facts concerning the history of the American Negro soldier”, and he is encouraged to “do [his] best to gain an understanding of their [i.e. his soldiers] points of view, of their likes and dislikes, and of their limitations and advantages. Learn about their history, their families, their ambitions and fears”.⁵³ While the manual offers a substantial chapter on African American military history⁵⁴ and empirically refutes many stereotypical notions about African Americans, it does not offer much guidance on how the officers are supposed to reflect on and overcome their own racist socialization (inside and) outside the military. Though this is not its explicit goal, the document can easily be read as a potential re-education tool and bespeaks the necessity to address racism and discrimination especially in times of war. It clearly falls short of doing so with an eye to the institution of the military itself. The Army is depicted as offering a potential remedy for some structural injustices, prejudices, and “racism by consequence”⁵⁵ in society (e.g. through providing health care and education to all of its soldiers). Beliefs in racial superiority are assigned to the Germans and Japanese,⁵⁶ and while racism is clearly marked in mainstream media and in camp communities (again with white officers being called upon to mediate or alleviate these inequalities),⁵⁷ its existence among the troops is downplayed, if not outright ignored. The manual, for instance, emphasizes that black soldiers serve in all capacities, in all regions where US troops are deployed, and across all military

50 Ibid., pp. 33–34.

51 See *ibid.*, pp. 4 and 10.

52 Ibid., p. 17. The text explains, for example: “Much that has been marked off as ‘Negro traits’ in civilian life, such as lack of initiative, mental laziness, lack of ambition, and irresponsibility, may be traced back to the limited opportunities afforded the Negro to obtain information and to see the relevance of his job to some goal which has importance to him” (*ibid.*, p. 21).

53 Ibid., pp. 19, 23, and 34.

54 The importance of historical knowledge is made explicit: “The longest chapter in this book is the one on ‘The Negro Soldier in American History’. Its length is an indication of how important it is believed to be to all soldiers, Negro and white, that they know the record of the colored troops in every war in which the United States has fought” (p. 23).

55 T. J. Guess, *The Social Construction of Whiteness: Racism by Intent, Racism by Consequence*, in: *Critical Sociology* 32 (2006) 4, pp. 649–673, at 652.

56 See *Leadership*, p. 26.

57 Ibid., chaps. 6 and 7.

branches and ranks and states that among soldiers “[n]o racial differentials have been discovered in their ability to lead troops”.⁵⁸ It neither discusses segregation in the Army in detail nor does it explore the fact that African American soldiers were mostly confirmed to service units.⁵⁹ One soldier, Wade McCree, for example, talks about the officer corps as a “big disappointment” because it was predominantly white and he explains that “[t]here was no competition for assignments above company grade at the command level because all one had to do was to be white. Before a Negro officer would be promoted to the same rank as a white officer, the white would be immediately upgraded.”⁶⁰

The manual further asserts that it is not the Army’s responsibility to redeem, address, or change racism, anti-black discrimination, and white privilege in society:

*In numerous instances, both in the United States and abroad, the Negro soldier has been welcomed into the community and has been invited to share in the programs and activities designed for servicemen. Too often, however, the cordiality has been disturbed by the attitude and actions of white soldiers who come from sections where there is rigid separation between the races. This seems wrong to the Negro soldier. [...] When this kind of difficulty arises it is the responsibility of command to remind individuals that the Army has no authority to attempt to change existing community inter-racial patterns in any direction at all because of social preference.*⁶¹

The ambivalent racial politics of the document are neatly captured in this passage. The manual reveals an acute awareness of racism and its consequences for African Americans specifically as well as the nation at large but fails to overcome its own “possessive investment in whiteness” as it, in fact, promotes a “form of cultural unity at no cost to whites”.⁶² Acknowledging and facilitating black advancement within the controlled setting of the military secures the success of American forces in World War II without requiring any reflection of white privilege. In this sense, it steers clear of potential triggers for “white fragility”.⁶³ The normativity and hegemony of whiteness is not lastingly challenged and only suspended within the military for the sake of troop readiness and victory in war. The effects of racism are presented as a problem for *white* officers to solve without, ultimately, unsettling their authority and position of power (ensured not just through their whiteness but also their military rank). They are endowed with agency and authority to meet this “challenge” if they take the lessons of this manual to heart.

58 Ibid., p. 9.

59 Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, p. xi.

60 Qtd. in Motley, *The Invisible Soldier*, p. 297.

61 Leadership, p. 59.

62 G. Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, rev. and exp. edn, Philadelphia 2006, pp. 2 and 82.

63 “[Triggered] by discomfort and anxiety, [white fragility] is born of superiority and entitlement.” The term, as defined by Robin DiAngelo, “[summarizes] the familiar patterns of white people’s responses to racial discomfort” (R. DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard to Talk to White People about Racism*, Boston 2018, p. 2).

4. Conclusion: Modelling Whiteness, Exporting Racism?

According to the manual, the adjustment of white officers to avoid explicitly racist behaviour, actions, and speech acts, is a matter of military duty and responsibility (not of moral rightness or a sense of justice) and it takes on special significance abroad:

[T]he American Negro soldier will be a new experience for the citizens of [other] [...] countries, and at the beginning there will of course be no common understanding or specific customary way of regarding him. Here is a potential source of trouble which must be guarded against by the Army itself, for the citizens of a country in which our men are stationed will tend in the absence of any previous contacts with large groups of American Negroes, to follow the example of white American officers and men. If individuals wearing the uniform of the American Army abroad show disrespect for others wearing the same uniform who happen to be colored, an example will have been set which may lead to lowering of the morale of Negro troops, increased chances for open trouble with the local population, interference with military efficiency, and a nationally regrettable loss of dignity and respect for the uniform of our Army.⁶⁴

The manual stresses the model function of white soldiers for e.g. a (white) German population and propagates a kind of colour-blindness. The notion of soldiers who “happen to be colored”, of course, denies the effects of structural racism and of white privilege and stands in stark contrast to the policies and realities in the Jim Crow Army dispatched to oversee re-education and reorientation efforts in Germany.

Although American-style segregation was in effect at some locations in Europe, many black soldiers experienced unfettered relationships with local people. Generally, the only time black soldiers ran into blatant discrimination was when they encountered white American soldiers.⁶⁵

The (unintended) re-educational potential that can be identified in US propaganda as well as internal military documents concerning race and racism was ultimately not realized and the example set for Germans to emulate was that of white superiority and racial discrimination, American style. The power of this “shared sense of whiteness” could be observed early on with regard to the treatment of German prisoners of war. A soldier, Bert B. Babero, writes in a letter to the civilian aide to the secretary of war about the lamentable conditions at Camp Barkeley (Texas):

It was to my amazement [...] when I had the opportunity of visiting the German concentration camp here at Barkeley to observe a sign in the latrine, actually segregating a section of the latrine for Negro soldiers, the other being used by the German prisoners and

64 Leadership, p. 60.

65 Morehouse, Fighting in the Jim Crow Army, p. 200.

*the white soldiers. Seeing this was honestly disheartening. It made me feel, here, the tyrant is actually placed over the liberator.*⁶⁶

As Maggi Morehouse has observed, “[b]y the end of the war, there were many chinks in the armor of the army’s segregation without discrimination policy”.⁶⁷ During the occupation years, however, the US military not only tried to cap and reduce the percentage of black soldiers but, in fact, “established a program of affirmative action for white men”.⁶⁸ The whiteness of the US Army and, by extension, the construction of whiteness as the norm in US society were largely preserved and enforced. Even though the black GI became a powerful figure in Germany’s collective memory of the post-war years, the face of re-education and democratization was predominantly white and anti-racist rhetoric mostly a matter of written declarations or public lip service which hardly translated into individual behaviour and institutional practices during the occupation years.

Combat historian Melvin Lasky discusses the issue of fraternization in Germany in the weeks and months after the end of World War II, and specifically addresses the relationships between black soldiers and white women as part of the highly sexualized landscape of war-torn Europe. His observations not only point towards a lack of racism among the German population but also reinforce stereotypical notions of black masculinity. In Frankfurt am Main, he notes on 4 December 1945 that there was a raid in the barracks of black soldiers, where “twenty-four ‘white German fräuleins’” were found and that one German woman remarked when “asked if she knew that social intimacy not to mention sexual relations with Negroes was normally frowned on” that she “[doesn’t] see anything wrong. They’re Americans. Same as you – are they not? Your democracy says all men are the same.”⁶⁹ He further jots down a “conversation piece” quoting a soldier saying “I just love that white meat I’ve been getting. Those fräuleins have sure been good to us. I just love that white meat and I’m gonna look for more of it when I get back to the States...”⁷⁰ Lasky’s disdain for black soldiers and their relationships with white German women is obvious, and the depiction of his own numerous sexual exploits, which he details with pride and a strong sense of entitlement, further reveal the white privilege and superiority that shape his perspective. There is a double standard with regard to race and the argument

66 Reprinted in Wynn, *African American Experience*, pp. 118–119.

67 Morehouse, *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army*, p. 208.

68 Green, *Black Yanks in the Pacific*, p. 17. In the immediate aftermaths of war, the percentage of African Americans among the armed forces skyrocketed due to reenlistments as well as new recruits. “The army initially responded to the challenge by organizing a committee [...] under the direction of Lieutenant General Alvan C. Gillem, Jr., to evaluate the future use of black troops. [...] Their report, *The Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Postwar Army*, called for increased occupational opportunities for African American servicemen, the elimination of all-black army divisions, equality in the commissioning of officers, and the assignment of black troops to communities where racial attitudes were supposedly benign (outside the American South and certain European locales, in other words). Most of their recommendations [...] remained operational on paper only. On the other hand, officials enthusiastically embraced the Gillem Board’s proposal to set the proportion of African American personnel in the army at one in ten, roughly equal to the percentage of African Americans in the U.S. population” (ibid., p. 16).

69 Quoted in M. J. Lasky, ‘First Indorsement’ *Journal of a Conscript*. 1945. Melvin J. Lasky Papers, Lasky Center for Transatlantic Studies, München, Box: New York 1, Folder: 1, p. 243.

70 Ibid.

put forth by the “attractive well-dressed wife of a former German Army officer” – as Lasky describes the German woman quoted above – prefigures the myth of a post-racial moment in post-war Germany.⁷¹

The re-education programmes that ushered in the dominant success story of Germany’s democratization and its strong transatlantic alliance with the United States, have to be situated within the larger conundrum of racial politics at the time. The systemic anti-black racism in the US military as well as among the German population and its long-lasting effects have been extensively documented.⁷² If the US Army unintentionally became a social relations laboratory during World War II, the experiment obviously failed as racism persisted well beyond the formal desegregation of the military through executive order 9981 issued by President Truman in 1948. Yet, at least on paper and within a clearly limited moment of wartime efforts, the fight against racism and fascism abroad brought about propaganda and military policies which de facto named and exposed racism in the US and can be understood as however reluctant, imperfect, and unrealized re-educational efforts directed towards white US-Americans. This is not to say that whiteness as an unmarked norm was debunked or lastingly destabilized in the process, but it may have been a minor and inadvertent factor in facilitating black advancement as well as triggering a pronounced effort among whites to safeguard, assert, and (re)stabilize their identity as unmarked, national norm. In this sense, the US as a model for German democracy entailed a model of whiteness and the export of democracy potentially included the export of the racializations and racism entrenched in US society and culture. How Germans appropriated the American racial regime is, of course, another question. There have, for example, also been moments of what Berndt Ostendorf has termed “subversive re-education” with regard to jazz music as part of the re-education programmes or African American culture being appropriated in post-war Germany.⁷³ Such instances certainly challenged these racializations and exposed the pitfalls of US democracy and the structural inequalities it entailed, but they also coded race and racism as “American” problems thus paving the way for a reconstitution of German identity along the lines of whiteness that continues to shape public discourses and lived realities today. Overall, the post-war transatlantic world saw a moment of a profound destabilization of racial regimes on both sides of the Atlantic; this moment came and went, and the opening that it presented found closure in a reaffirmation of whiteness as a source of power and privilege for both white US-American and white German national identities.

71 Ibid.

72 It appears not only in the many oral and written testimonies by African American soldiers (see, for example, P. McGuire [ed.], *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II*, 1983, Lexington 1993; or Morehouse, *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army*) but is also evinced in the criminalization of African American soldiers in the post-war years, especially with regard to the racialization of rape, or in the extensive debates about the brown babies and their “fate” in a structurally racist and predominantly white German society.

73 B. Ostendorf, *Subversive Reeducation? Jazz as a Liberating Force in Germany and Europe*, in: *Revue française d’études américaines* 5 (2001), pp. 53–71.